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Washington: Let 'Em Eat Missiles

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Dec. 8—Despite all the shouting about the Americans and the Russians agreeing to bar weapons from outer space, the practical truth is that another tragic expansion of the Soviet-U.S. arms race is now in prospect. The Moscow Government has already gone far enough with the installation of an anti-ballistic missile (A.B.M.) system to increase the military and political pressures on the Johnson Administration to do the same.

This much has been confirmed by Secretary of Defense McNamara, but no decision to approve the fantastic costs of a major U.S. antiballistic missile and shelter system will be taken until Washington makes one more effort to convince the Soviet Government that this is an unnecessary and reckless waste.

Moratorium or Slow-Down

There is even some talk here of sending Secretary McNamara to Moscow to seek a slow-down if not a moratorium on the A.B.M. programs of the two countries. But in any event, the effort will be made through diplomatic channels to review the problem with Soviet officials before the U.S. military budget is finally approved this month.

The irony of this situation is that the question of large new military budgets for A.B.M. systems is coming up precisely when the already swollen defense costs are beginning to interfere with both Moscow's and Washington's promises to improve the standard of living of their poorest citizens.

Nevertheless, despite the Johnson Administration's efforts to hold A.B.M. costs to a minimum, the Soviet Government has already begun deploying antimissile weapons around both Moscow and Leningrad. The feeling here is that the Moscow Government is determined to prove during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Soviet revolution next year that it has the capacity to defend itself against any kind of attack.

Secretary McNamara, who will be in Europe most of next week for the North Atlantic Treaty meetings, has been against spending the \$40 billion necessary to install a major antimissile defense system, on the ground that more can be gained for far less money by developing new offensive missiles that will penetrate the Soviet antimissile system if necessary.

The political arguments

against this, however, are obvious. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are unanimously for deploying an antimissile system in this country. The McNamara argument would leave the U.S. vulnerable to intercontinental missiles, and the President would be left to face the charge that the Soviets were willing to provide an antimissile system for the Soviet people while President Johnson was not willing to do the same to protect the American people.

Never mind that one more upward spiral of the arms race would probably leave both sides with no more real security than they have now. Never mind that after both sides have an antimissile system the race will then start all over to produce new more expensive and more sophisticated missiles that can penetrate the antimissile systems. Never mind that the costs will cut even deeper into the poverty programs. The Administration must not be vulnerable to political attack. It must have an effective antipolitical missile system even if it cannot get an effective anti-ballistic missile system. And let the poor eat missiles and live in shelters!

Maybe McNamara or somebody else can stop this madness before it gets out of hand. He is not responsible for it and

would like to stop it if he can, but the prospects are not good. The Vietnam war and the Chinese threats have obviously increased the influence of the Soviet military since the start of the Kosygin-Brezhnev regime, and though Soviet officials continue to talk optimistically about a treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries, they are obviously encouraging a nuclear race with the United States.

Moscow's Mood

The British Foreign Secretary George Brown, found them very tough during his recent visit to Moscow—unyielding on Vietnam, determined to believe in the revival of Nazism in Germany, and not even willing to set up a committee of Anglo-Soviet scientists to study way of stopping underground nuclear tests.

This is one of those moments when the personal intervention of the President in Moscow might have influenced the arms race, but again Vietnam interferes. It poisons everything. It has disrupted the economy, envenomed our politics, hurt the alliance, divided our people, and now it is interfering with the critical question of the arms race.